16 Problems of Parallelism in Gogol's Prose

The role of parallelism in poetry has been thoroughly investigated, and its fundamental role in that genre is generally acknowledged.[1] More troublesome is the question of the basic difference between the roles of parallelism in poetry and in prose. Is there only a quantitative difference? In poetry equivalence prevails, and therefore we may "read" it as a paradigmatic column; in prose, on the other hand, such is not the case. Yet in prose, as in poetry, we do compare one segment with another, especially if parallelistic construction prevails over strong plot construction—the forward-moving chain of causally connected events. In order to pinpoint the role of parallelism in both types of discourse, I should mention another idea: in poetry one finds "the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination" (Jakobson 1960, 358). In other words, in poetry equivalence is compulsory on all levels. Due to this operation, those elements which in nonpoetic speech remain "latent" and "prerequisite" are pushed by the poetic combinatorial pattern "onto the level of a patent, "palpable" and "perceptible" form" (Holenstein 1974, 123). In that case the phenomenal (not just the descriptive) difference between poetry and prose can be seen. In prose, however, the parallelistic makeup cannot change its very nature. (I am not speaking here of hybrid forms.)

With this in mind, and not attempting to analyze further the question of comparison between the two types of discourse, let us begin our search for characteristic traces of prosaic parallelism. The first question to ask is: What categories may function as equivalent in prose (in any narrative form), or even what equivalences are "compulsory or enjoy a high preference"?[2] The answer seems to be rather obvious—that such equivalence in the narrative text is formed of characters. One finds this in folklore, most often in fairy tales, in which two brothers, for example, are juxtaposed against the principles of intelligence and stupidity, or—should it be a triad—intelli-

gence, stupidity, and goodness. There can be a good and a bad brother or a beautiful and a plain sister. The first example from high literature that comes to mind is *Eugene Onegin*, in which a similar operation is applied. Ol'ga and Tat'iana are juxtaposed on the principle of a contrast: the first is beautiful and banal; the second is not remarkable in her appearance but shows deep feeling and is intriguing in her behavior. The same contraposition can be observed in the characteristics of the male pair: Lenskii, the naïve enthusiast, and Onegin, the experienced skeptic. The contrasting parallelism is carried further in the two plot lines, which, up to Lenskii's death, are opposed as the idyllic versus the unhappy love affair. (It is worth noting that the first member of the plot opposition—Ol'ga-Lenskii—is developed as an element of parody.) Much has been written about the parallelistic construction of Tolstoi's prose (e.g., Shklovskii 1923; Eikhenbaum 1928, 1931, 1960). Let me emphasize that it is always a *character* who plays the fundamental role as an element of equivalence in the narrative, as Bitsilli correctly observed in his monograph on Chekhov (1942).

A particular type of parallelism of characters is the case of the double. While all previously reviewed instances presented an *equivalence*—that is, not similarity but *comparability* in some properties of the two elements close in space—the concept of the double is based on *pure similarity*. Two persons resemble each other so much that one can be taken for the other. Sometimes twins may function as doubles, as, for example, in Pil'niak's novel *Dvoiniki* (*The Doubles*). "The Brothers," by Plautus, is an earlier example of the same device.

Besides the resemblance to an extent of interchangeability, there is also another possible relation between the doubles: *symbiosis*. Two persons may be so similar in their biological structure and psychology that one cannot live without the other. The best recent example of this is the film by the French director Grimblat, *Dites-le avec les fleurs*; the two small twin brothers look the same, behave the same way, play always exactly the same game, always together, so that when one is carried away swimming in the sea and finally drowns, the other goes after him.

Finally, one more relation should be mentioned: the struggle. It often happens that someone's double acts as an evil power attempting to annihilate his partner. This became the most popular topic in nineteenth-century literature; in fact, it was a fundamental problem in both the literature and the philosophy of the time (Chizhevsky

1962, 113). The most typical example of the vicious double can be found in Dostoevskii's novels, the first of which is entitled *The Double* (1846). The protagonist, Goliadkin, is persecuted by his own image, who tries to "squeeze him out" of his place in life. In fact, Dostoevskii's major works after the Siberian period are dominated by a series of doubles: *The Possessed* (1872–73), *A Raw Youth* (1875), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80). The evil role of the central hero's double is continually evident. Frequent examples of such behavior can also be seen in the case of the double-shadow or the double-mirror reflection in the fantastic stories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The shadow leaves his master, and the latter can no longer exist as himself (e.g., "The Man Who Lost His Shadow," by Hans Christian Andersen). The mirror reflection subordinates the real model to his will, and as a result, the man changes his nature and becomes half-insane (see Chaianov's *Venetsianskoe zerkalo* [*Venetian Mirror*], 1923).

Gogol's prose is populated by some very peculiar couples. The relations between them include all three of the variations mentioned above. In "The Inspector General" Bobchinskii and Dobchinskii are similar in various aspects: exterior appearance, behavior, and names that differ only in their initial sounds (specifically, by one distinctive feature: labial versus dental). As is often the case, similarity brings about symbiosis: Bobchinskii *never* appears without Dobchinskii; and more importantly, they even speak together, either pronouncing a single sentence simultaneously or "sharing" a sentence—one utters the first half, and the other the second. Major Kovalev and his nose ("The Nose") are actually two independent heroes, according to a perceptive observation by Annenskii. That witty critic called the second protagonist Nose and regarded his strange adventures or metamorphoses as a rational procedure: a revenge for the maltreatment he suffers from the major's barber (Annenskii 1906, 4–5). Vinogradov, in his study on "The Nose," pointed specifically to the motif of the double ([1929] 1976). Indeed, Kovalev's nose not only begins to live an independent life ("Ia sam po sebe" ["I am by myself"]) but also *resembles* its master by its uniform (except that *the nose's* uniform is one rank higher), behavior, and apparently also other external features, since Kovalev "recognizes" him. Needless to say, the relation of symbiosis in this case is strongly emphasized by Kovalev's surrealistic worries about how he can make a marriage proposal without his nose. This particular symbiosis is a natural

biological factor, and its destruction creates the surrealistic set of the story. The third relation, the struggle, is also present. As Annenskii pointed out, the impostor, Nose, is punishing Kovalev by his peculiar actions for not having protected him properly against the barber, Ivan Iakovlevich. In "The Old-World Landowners" the similarity of the couple lies totally in their habits, above all in the cult of food and its consumption (characteristically, the couple has no children). Symbiosis is the most important factor in the story: after the death of Pul'kheria Ivanovna, Afanasii Ivanovich must die too.

My last comment concerns the strange pair Kochkarev and Podkolesin from the play *Marriage* (*Zhenit'ba*, 1842). These two heroes are tied together by a specific kind of symbiosis: Podkolesin cannot make a marriage proposal without Kochkarev, in whose head the whole idea was born and who is literally forcing his feeble friend to do it, without any reason or motivation of his own. Podkolesin has no will power and no initiative; Kochkarev has too much of both. So these characters complement each other. As in the case of Bobchinskii and Dobchinskii, even the speech of Podkolesin is not independent: it is Kochkarev who puts words into his mouth. They *share* the most unusual act that can be shared: a marriage proposal. And precisely because of this the marriage does not materialize, since it cannot be shared. The essence of the comedy lies in this very fact: that the symbiosis is entirely directed toward an aim that cannot be achieved. The whole comedy is conceived as troubles with multiplicity: the groom is split into two voices, and therefore he cannot marry. The bride cannot choose between many, none of whom pleases her as one whole: only a combination of various features taken from each of them would create an ideal man for her.

Of the three types of relations that can connect a pair of protagonists, the last example contains only symbiosis. It proves the intricateness of Gogol's play with the situation of a pair: from the full set of relations between the two characters to its marginal elements.

All three relations between a pair—similarity, symbiosis, and struggle—may be viewed as relations of comparability, and as such they enter into the problem of equivalence; that is, of parallelism. So far in scholarship the problem of the double has been treated philosophically (Chizhevsky, Hessen) or typologically (Vinogradov). It has never been translated into the category of parallelism. In Gogol's case such an approach is most appropriate, especially when dealing with "Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforo-

vich." The treatment of the doubles in this story presents a special type of parody. The title itself is revealing. Its length already arrests one's attention. The same may be said about each chapter's title; for example, "Glava 4-aia, iz kotoroi chitatel' legko mozhet uznat', chto v nei soderzhitsia" ("The Fourth Chapter, from Which the Reader Can Easily Learn What It Contains").[3] A particular source of humor resides in the very names of the protagonists. It is not only that one of them bears the most common name in the Russian cultural tradition—the source of jokes and proverbs (such expressions as "Call it anything—call it Ivan Ivanovich"); more important is the fact that the two names are almost identical, as in the case of Bobchinskii and Dobchinskii. The structure of the story is based entirely on parallelism, and thus it is much more exposed as compared with the other stories or dramas by Gogol', creating almost a "bare device" (*obnazhennyi priem*). The entire first chapter, appropriately entitled "Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich," consists only of a set of comparative characteristics of both protagonists. It is nothing but a series of juxtapositions. The nature of these parallel descriptions is very peculiar. Gogol' makes a special point of them, emphasizing the fact of the juxtaposition and the principle of contrast. Having first introduced Ivan Ivanovich, the narrator turns to the next protagonist and remarks: "Несмотря на большую приязнь, эти редкие друзья *не совсем были сходны* между собою. Лучше всего можно узнать характеры их из *сравнения*" ("In spite of great friendship, those exceptional friends *were not quite similar*. One can best learn their character from a *comparison*").[4] On closer investigation of the comparisons offered by the author, it is easy to see that he is playing with an *illogical contrast* and a *false contrast*. An example of the first can be seen in the following juxtaposition:

> Иван Иванович несколько боязливого характера. // У Ивана Никифоровича, напротив того, шаровары в таких широких складках, что если бы раздуть их, то в них можно бы поместить весь двор с амбарами и строением.
>
> Ivan Ivanovich is of a somewhat shy character. // Ivan Nikiforovich, just the opposite, has such large folds in his trousers, that if blown up, they could hide the whole backyard together with the barns and other buildings.

The illogical character of this comparison lies in the fact that the two members of the comparison are not comparable because—as Slo-

nimskii would put it—they belong to two different semantic realms. Such a construction, as this brilliant critic showed, is typical of Gogol' (1923, 43–46). But the prevailing operation, the *false contrast*, is based on a different principle. Several examples, taken consecutively, should precede a generalization:

> Иван Иванович имеет необыкновенный дар говорить чрезвычайно приятно. . . . Слушаешь, слушаешь—и голову повесишь . . . как он после купанья. // Иван Никифорович, напротив, больше молчит, но зато если влепит словцо, то держись только: отбреет лучше всякой бритвы.
>
> Иван Иванович худощав и высокого роста; // Иван Никифорович немного ниже, но зато распространяется в толщину.
>
> Голова у Ивана Ивановича похожа на редьку хвостом вниз; // голова Ивана Никифоровича на редьку хвостом вверх.
>
> Иван Иванович только после обеда лежит в одной рубашке под навесом; к вечеру же надевает бекешу и идет куда-нибудь . . . // Иван Никифорович лежит весь день на крыльце . . . и никуда не хочет идти.
>
> Иван Иванович бреет бороду в неделю два раза; // Иван Никифорович—один раз.
>
> Ivan Ivanovich has the rare gift of talking in an extraordinarily nice way. . . . You listen and listen—and you lower your head, . . . like sleeping after a bath. // Ivan Nikiforovich is just the opposite, keeps silent most of the time, but if he says a word—you should be careful: it is sharper than any blade.
>
> Ivan Ivanovich is slim and tall; // Ivan Nikiforovich is a bit shorter, but he extends in width.
>
> The head of Ivan Ivanovich resembles a radish, tail down; // the head of Ivan Nikiforovich—a radish, tail up.
>
> Ivan Ivanovich lies down on his covered porch, just in his shirt, only after lunch; in the evening he puts on his *bekesha*-coat, and he goes out someplace. // Ivan Nikiforovich lies on his porch all day long, and he does not want to go anywhere.
>
> Ivan Ivanovich shaves twice a week; // Ivan Nikiforovich—just once.

Besides, concerning Ivan Ivanovich, "proshlo bolee desiati let, kak on ovdovel" ("more than ten years passed since Ivan Ivanovich became a widower"), Ivan Nikiforovich "nikogda ne byl zhenat" ("was never married").

Even at a glance it is clear that these contrasts are purely superfi-

cial. Not only can they be reduced to the most conventional oppositions—thin-fat, polite-rude, talkative-silent—but in each case there is an element in one member of the opposition that equates it with the other: Ivan Ivanovich is talkative and Ivan Nikiforovich is silent; but Ivan Ivanovich's talk is apparently boring, so its effect is similar to the second case (that is, silence): "You listen . . . and you lower your head." Ivan Ivanovich is thin and Ivan Nikiforovich is fat; but while the first is tall, the second "extends in width." The difference is only in the *direction* of growing. In other words, these comparative pairs function as *synonyms*. Their synonymy is further underscored by the fact that the majority of the comparisons are real synonyms or virtually identities: the radish tail up versus the radish tail down; lying down half a day versus lying down the whole day (= long time); unmarried versus widowed (= single); shaving twice a week versus shaving once a week (= seldom).

The underlying device here is that which is declared to be opposite (or contrasting) is in fact identical. The *illusion* of oppositions is emphasized by the use of syntactical forms—the *matrices* of opposition: two compared phrases are either connected by the contrasting conjunction *naprotiv* or simply juxtaposed as two parallel sentences; but the contrasting juxtaposition (opposition) *precedes* the simple juxtaposition, thus underscoring the idea of a contrast. In this way the contrasting parallelism appears to be *its own parody*.

Where did Gogol' find the model for such a device? Quite certainly, in folklore. His interest in folklore is too well known to need much discussion here. I will mention only that "Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" was the first work he wrote after the two folkloristic volumes of *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka* (1833; cf. comments by Mashinskii in Gogol' 1952, 335), and that it first appeared in Smirdin's journal *Novosel'e* (1834) with the subtitle "Odna iz neizdannykh bylin pasichnika Rudogo Pan'ka" ("One of the Unpublished Stories of the Beekeeper Rudy Pan'ko"). Through his favorite narrator, Rudy Pan'ko, immediate ties with the oral tradition are reestablished, particularly by the use of *skaz*, a device more obvious in the "Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" than in other tales of *Mirgorod*.

Parodic parallelism is well known in Russian folklore, in both verbal and visual forms (the latter being represented by the *lubki* paintings). The most famous example is the "Povest' o Ereme i Fome" ("The Tale of Jeremy and Thomas"), probably from the

seventeenth century.[5] It presents the two brothers, living "as close as one man," having similar faces but different in some other respects:

> В некоем было месте жили-были два брата—Фома да Ерема, за Един человек, лицем они единаки, а приметами разны.
>
> Ерема был крив, а Фома з бельмом,
> Ерема был плешив, а Фома шелудив.
> У Еремы клеть, а у Фомы изба.
> Ерема за ретку, а Фома за чеснок. Ерема чеснок лупит, а Фома толчет.
> Как Фома купил телку, а Ерема-то бычка.
> Как Фома-то купил свинку, а Ерема боровка.
> (Bogatyrev 1971, 402–4, 412)[6]
>
> In a certain place there lived two brothers, Thomas and Jeremy, like one man; they were similar in face but different in their peculiar marks.
>
> Jeremy was blind in one eye, and Thomas was wall-eyed;
> Jeremy was bald-patched, and Thomas was scabby.
> Jeremy had a cell, and Thomas had a hut.
> Jeremy holds a radish, and Thomas holds a garlic. Jeremy peels his garlic, and Thomas pounds his.
> As Thomas bought a calf, Jeremy bought a small bull.
> As Thomas bought a piglet, Jeremy bought a small hog.

In other versions: "Ерема купил мерина, а Фома-то жеребца" ("Jeremy bought a gelding; Thomas bought a stallion"). Or: "Ерема купил лошадь, Фома-то соловка" ("Jeremy bought a horse, and Thomas bought a dun"; Bogatyrev 1971, 406). About their misfortunes: "Ерему в шею, а Фому в толчки. . . . Ерема ушел, а Фома убежал" ("Jeremy got it in the neck, and Thomas got it in his back. . . . Jeremy walked away, and Thomas ran away"; Bogatyrev 1971, 405).

Syntactical parallelism itself emphasizes the *similarity* between the two (Bogatyrev 1971, 404). On the other hand, at the beginning it is made clear that the brothers are "primetami raznye" ("different in their peculiar marks"). It is this declaration of differences between them that motivates the endless chain of juxtaposed sentences. So, as in Gogol's case, the expected difference turns out to be similarity or mere identity.

Among juxtaposed grammatical categories, like those in "Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich," we find

synonyms as well as categories that are only proximate in meaning; for example, "Erema za retku, a Foma za chesnok" ("Jeremy holds a radish, and Thomas holds a garlic"). According to Bogatyrev,

> Если в практической речи мы видим тенденцию к различению синонимов, то в поэзии, в частности в фольклоре, *мы встречаем использование слов близких по значению в роли синонимов.* Так . . . редька и чеснок, которые в практической речи отнюдь не являются синонимами, означают [в повести о двух братьях] одинаково скудную пищу, то есть использованы как синонимы. (1971, 404)
>
> While in ordinary speech we notice a tendency to differentiate synonyms, in poetry, and in particular in folklore, *we find words similar in meaning used as if they were synonyms.* So . . . radish and garlic, which in ordinary speech are not at all synonymous [in the tale of the two brothers], signify similarly poor nourishment, i.e., they are used as synonyms.

This statement can be applied with complete precision to Gogol's text, as the previous analysis has shown. The author of the famous "Tale" used folkloric principles here as well as in other instances in his prose, and apparently did it quite consciously. The same can be said about the figure of oxymoron used by Gogol' in the same text in typical folkloric manner as well. Bogatyrev quotes examples of the oxymoron from various types of oral tradition ("v prigovorakh balagannykh i karusel'nykh dedov, v razlichnykh p'esakh narodnogo teatra" ["in the utterances of puppet-booth and carousel attendants, in various plays from folk theater"]; 1971, 414), among them the following example: "Жил-был Фома Богатый: ни скинуть, ни надеть у него не было, а постлать не заводил" (1971, 413; "There once lived Thomas the Rich: he had no clothes to throw off or to put on, and he was not in the habit of sleeping in a bed"). From one text of the "Tale of Jeremy and Thomas" he cites the following:

> Были себе да жили два человека,
> Торговые люди, славно живут,
> Сладко пьют и едят, носят хорошо.
> У Еремы клеть, а у Фомы изба. . . .
> Ерема за редьку, а Фома за чеснок;
> Ерема чеснок лупит, а Фома толчет;
> Только сидят, ничего не едят.
> (1971, 414)

> There once lived two men;
> both men of commerce, they lived well;
> they ate and drank well; they were well dressed.
> Jeremy had a cell, and Thomas a hut. . . .
> Jeremy holds a radish, and Thomas a garlic;
> Jeremy peels his garlic, and Thomas pounds his.
> They are just sitting, they have nothing to eat.

The last oxymoron is quite developed—it is not just the two members within a phrase in which the meaning of one contradicts the meaning of the other. In "Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich," Gogol' goes much further. In fact, the entire story is built on the oxymoronic principle. At the beginning the two Ivans are declared the best of friends—but they turn out to be the worst of enemies. The whole first chapter attempts to prove that both Ivan Ivanovich and Ivan Nikiforovich are "marvelous people," while all their behavior proves just the opposite, and the story ends with the famous phrase: "Skuchno na etom svete, gospoda!" ("It's dreary in this world, ladies and gentlemen!")—the result of the existence of such "marvelous people."

I have devoted so much space to demonstrating the oxymoron in order to prove that in this story Gogol' follows folkloric tradition in more than one direction, and that this was not just an accident but a conscious operation. It is also a good opportunity to show that both principles—parodic parallelism and oxymoron—serve the same purpose: to bring about a result contradictory to what has been stated initially. We may even say that parallelism of this sort is close to oxymoron in its basic function.

The comic equivalence in "Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" is presented on several levels of expression. First, the two names are morphologically identical, and (this should be emphasized) they follow each other in the folkloric tradition: the shorter name precedes the longer one (in the tale of Jeremy and Thomas a *chiasmic* variation is used). As in the folkloric "Tale," the names in Gogol's work serve as a pitch pipe for the parallelism of the characters that follows. The story line is built according to the same principle of comic equivalence. On the surface, the action forms a regular causal order: an offense causes a complaint to the court, which is answered by a reciprocal complaint. Yet the elements of the chain are of a peculiar character. First of all, the main causes are obliterated because of their absurdity. It is not at

all clear why Ivan Ivanovich should be offended specifically by the word *gusak* (gander) when Ivan Nikiforovich has characterized him with much stronger expressions during the same meeting. So his selection of this word from the repertoire of derogatory terms as the offense was totally arbitrary; all the trouble is thus born out of nothing. Then, the exchange of actions that follows this first "cause" strikes with strict *reciprocity*: one act follows another at high speed and with exact rhythm, like quick replies in an argument. Reciprocal action is an *equivalent* in itself. But this particular equivalence is, again, that of similarity. Ivan Nikiforovich builds a goose house on his neighbor's premises; // Ivan Ivanovich destroys it (= the problem of property); Ivan Ivanovich writes a complaint to the court; // Ivan Nikiforovich writes a complaint to the court. The objects of the complaints are almost identical: one about defamation, one about property, and—finally—an invented one: about each one threatening the other's life. The ending of the story brings the same similarity of behavior: *each* Ivan believes that the court (*palata*) will carry out the sentence against his enemy on *his* behalf "next week" (Ivan Nikiforovich) or "tomorrow" (Ivan Ivanovich). Once similar cause has generated similar (or identical) effect, the difference between cause and effect is obliterated. Reciprocity of similar and absurd acts results not in action but in stagnation: it is quasi action. Similarity generates similarity, or, more exactly, the absurd results in another, identical absurdity. This kind of quasi action can be perpetuated ad infinitum, and in fact it does create a *bad infinity*. Thus the author's comment at the end—"It's dreary in this world, ladies and gentlemen!"—is taken as a formula for a *taedium vitae*.

The peculiarities of the action are due to the fact that the two Ivans are absurdly identical; in fact, they may be viewed as two hypostases of the same idea of absurdity and stupidity. This brings us back to the problem of doubles. The two heroes are doubles, and they are connected by all three relations: similarity, symbiosis (as friends say: "Ikh sam chert verevochkoi sviazal" ["The devil himself tied them together"]), and struggle; the three relations overlap. Gogol' presents these relations in the form of a parody of parallelism appropriated from the folkloric archetype.